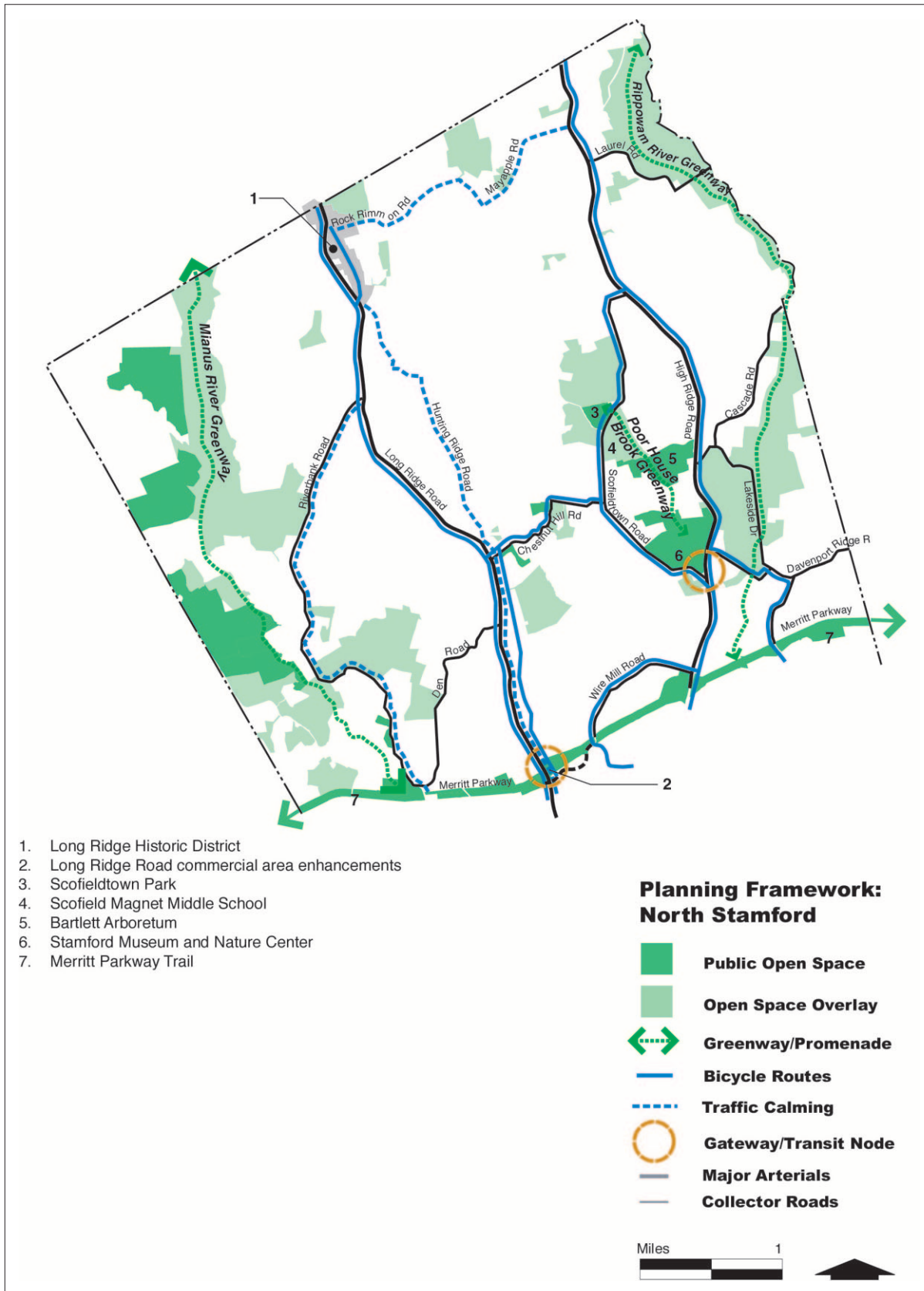


3 . NORTH STAMFORD

North Stamford takes in the entire portion of Stamford north of the Merritt Parkway, representing nearly one-half of the city's entire land area. With 15,000 people, North Stamford has an overall population density of 1,000 people per square mile – one-third that of the city as a whole. North Stamford is by far the most affluent neighborhood in the city, and helps to solidify the city's tax base as well as its reputation as a desirable community in which to live.

The neighborhood is almost exclusively comprised of single-family homes, on large wooded lots, set amidst rolling hills, accessed by winding streets. Public, quasi-public and protected property represents roughly one-fifth of the neighborhood's land area. Such property encompasses private school campuses, public parks, private recreation, reservoir holdings, open space preserves, and many smaller dedicated open spaces. Hills, rock outcroppings and small ponds are so prevalent in the landscape that roads and building lots have no choice but to conform: they create a place where the natural environment dominates. In its February 1, 1998 profile of North Stamford, the *New York Times* epitomized North Stamford as follows: "In a Bustling City, a Rural Haven."

North Stamford residents are particularly concerned about preserving these attractive features. In the workshops for the Master Plan, residents expressed significant interest in preserving the remaining open spaces, protecting wetlands and wooded lots, linking open spaces into greenbelts, and maintaining the scenic qualities of roads. Passionate advocacy was triggered by any threat to the rural/residential character of the neighborhood. In the same 1998 *New York Times* article cited above, the byline was "Residents Zealously Fight to Preserve [North Stamford's] Open Spaces."



Goal A:

Maintain and celebrate the diversity of Stamford's population and employment.

North Stamford is and should remain a low-density residential neighborhood. Property values are extraordinarily high, driving up housing costs, and thereby reducing the quantity of affordable units that might be built with public subsidies. The lack of sewers and infrastructure make multifamily housing impractical, in addition to it being out-of-place in North Stamford's rural landscape. Thus, there is no expectation that a significant amount of affordable housing will be built in North Stamford.

Yet the neighborhood can be expected to play its part in a housing diversity strategy. Participants in the planning process emphasize that their concern is not about affordable housing per se, but about social diversity.

Strategies:

3A1. Apply inclusionary housing regulations to any large-scale residential subdivisions and developments. Large-scale development will be rare -- and will be even rarer if other Plan recommendations (discussed below) are carried out. However, when subdivision or development of, for instance, ten or more homes happens, it should include a reasonable set-aside for affordable housing. As a matter of principle, the same set-asides expected of development elsewhere in the city should apply in North Stamford.

Goal B:

Pursue a new "City Beautiful" movement, celebrating and enhancing the city's main corridors, greenways, waterfront, hills, historic buildings, gateways, and especially the unique and central qualities of Stamford's neighborhoods.

This goal is central to the physical character of North Stamford, and the longstanding priorities expressed by North Stamford residents. One-third of the neighborhood is designated as two-acre (RA-2) and three-acre (RA-3) residential zones; virtually all of the remainder of the neighborhood is zoned as one-acre (RA-1) residential. Development has gone forward consistent with this framework. As made clear at the workshops and in the research for the Master Plan, additional, more nuanced tools are needed now.

In designing such tools, it is necessary to focus on the key design features of North Stamford, as a unique community. Significantly, in the outreach for this Plan, residents were not that concerned about bulky houses (also known as "McMansions") and residential building designs, probably because the neighborhood's topography, winding streets, large and irregularly shaped lots, and stone walls convey a good deal of visual privacy. Residents are mainly concerned about the neighborhood's scenery and natural environment.

Strategies:

3B1. Create greenways along the Mianus and Rippowam Rivers. Since 1990, the City has put a priority on open space initiatives pertaining to land adjoining

Opposite: Recommendations emphasize open space, greenways, scenic roads, and strict limits on non-residential development -- to preserve the neighborhood's rural image.

these two rivers; and it should continue to do so. A variety of strategies can be employed: public acquisition, deed restrictions, easements, dedications, cooperation with private land trusts, cooperation with neighboring municipalities, use of incentives (as discussed later), and use of new State legislation allowing the City to receive land area equal to 10 percent of a property's value. As these open spaces are linked and wherever practical, the City should promote public access, including walking and jogging trails through the greenways, wherever practical. The two river greenways should connect to another greenway along the Merritt Parkway, which has been designated as both a State Scenic Highway and a National Scenic By-way.

3B2. Create another greenway, linking key open spaces along the Poor House Brook, in the center of the neighborhood. The core of the greenway is the former UConn campus (now Scofield Magnet Middle School), the Bartlett Arboretum, and the Stamford Museum and Nature Center. It can and should be extended to the north, to take in a cemetery and adjoining undeveloped land; and to the west, to take in the City park and recycling facility across Scofieldtown Road. As part of this concept, the school campus and City park and facility should be well landscaped; the North Stamford Association has, for instance, called for a level of landscaping akin to that of an arboretum.

3B3. Designate large tracts of key open space as Open Space Overlay. The land to be targeted includes Bridgeport Hydraulic Company and Connecticut-American Water Company holdings, the arboretum, school grounds, land owned or protected by land trusts, land subject to tax relief under State Public Act 490, etc. Open Space Overlay Zones would involve reduced theoretical development potential, consistent with the current use of such sites, and the fact that the overall density of the neighborhood is predicated on the continued dedication of these large tracts primarily to open space and related, low-impact uses. Note that the underlying residential zoning, including its Special Exception rules, would still apply. The City should also consider using the Open Space Overlay to protect water quality and reduce pollution in the catchment areas for its reservoirs and aquifers.

3B4. Encourage conservation of environmentally sensitive land in North Stamford, as elsewhere in the city. "Conservation Subdivisions" should be encouraged on all parcels with environmentally sensitive land, especially parcels in the designated Open Space Overlay. Conservation Subdivisions involve groupings of homes, leaving environmentally sensitive land free of development. In North Stamford, such groupings would still consist of single family homes on relatively large (half-acre or one-acre) lots. In addition, environmentally sensitive land (wetlands, steep slopes, and perhaps floodplains) should be partly or fully deducted from calculations of yield, except as an incentive in connection with greenways and trail link-



Three riverside greenways link key open spaces like the Bartlett Arboretum, reservoir holdings and public parks.

ages and access, wetland reclamation, clustering, and/or environmentally sensitive buildings and site plans. In no case should density exceed that which would have been allowed were the land not encumbered.

3B5. Strengthen the City’s tools with regard to tree preservation. This could involve surveys and identification of key wooded properties and tree-lined streets for protection. It would include strengthening subdivision and other review procedures. It could involve a tree preservation ordinance. Tree preservation regulations vary widely—from regulations that protect the amount of land that is kept in natural vegetation to ordinances that promote the preservation of old-growth trees. The former is recommended for the low-density (RA) residential districts, mainly in North Stamford, Upper Newfield and Westover. It would be tied to preservation of the neighborhood’s rural character and protection of wetlands, steep slopes, areas with sensitive soils, and natural woodlands. It should not, however, restrict the ability of property owners to remove selected trees.

3B6. Over time, create a PDD (Preservation and Design District) for the Long Ridge Village historic district. This district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, already. The additional PDD designation would take advantage of recently enacted State legislation for “Village Districts.” Design guidelines should be drafted that would protect the historic district’s essential elements, consistent with the standards employed by the State Historic Preservation Office. The PDD should also address streetscape and promote the burying of wires. In addition, the City should conduct a survey of its historic resources, which, in North Stamford, include a scattering of historic homes dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

3B7. Designate North Stamford roads as official Scenic Corridors. Many of the neighborhood’s roads should be seriously considered for designation, though such action would require more documentation. Guidelines should be adopted to protect woods, stone walls, and other rustic features within the right-of-way of the scenic corridors. The guidelines could also address community suggestions for use of wood-faced barriers (as along the Merritt Parkway).

3B8. Over time, prepare a PDD (Preservation and Design District) for Long Ridge and High Ridge Roads, including the gateways at the Merritt Parkway exits. Design guidelines should focus on maintaining the rural character of these roads, in the face of growing traffic. The PDD should call for more extensive landscaping at the highway exits; and should promote the burying of power lines along these roads.

3B9. Explore sign regulations that respect the rural and residential char-

acter of North Stamford. As in other residential zones, the City should, within the limits of the law, seek to curtail commercial signage – be it for home businesses, on vehicles parked overnight, or for existing businesses. Potential actions include: (1) requiring that overnight parking of commercially registered vehicles with logos and signs of a certain size be screened from view from public roads in residential districts; (2) prohibiting temporary signs over a certain size, limiting them to one per property, and prohibiting them within the public right-of-way; (3) enacting stricter design guidelines for signs in designated Scenic Corridors; and of course (4) employing varied but specific design guidelines for signs in PDDs.



Design standards should be employed to maintain the scenic quality of North Stamford's roads.

Quality of life planning in North Stamford should be understood within the context of the vast housing choice of neighborhood residents, and their responsibilities as citizens of a diverse city. Even though they are surrounded by and can afford to live in some of the most desirable suburbs in the nation, neighborhood residents have chosen to live in North Stamford. At the same time, annoyance with various nuisance uses must be balanced with considerations of equity and fair share between the city's many neighborhoods

Strategies:

3C1. Discourage commercial uses in North Stamford. Pre-existing non-conforming ("grandfathered") uses should be constrained; zoning enforcement should be rigorously applied; and the neighborhood's two commercial districts should be kept to their present small size.

3C2. Prepare a PDD (Preservation and Design District) plan for the retail district along Long Ridge Road at the Merritt highway exit. This district is the closest thing that North Stamford has to a village center. The guidelines should especially focus on outdoor lighting, signage, arrangement of curb cuts, parking lot landscaping, pedestrian safety, views of the neighboring pond, burying of overhead wires, and other site and building conditions.

3C3. Retain Town facilities in North Stamford; but make them "good neighbors" in terms of the prevailing residential and rural ambiance of the neighborhood. Many residents complained bitterly about the appearance of the City park and leaf mulching facility on Scofieldtown Road. This facility is appropriately sited, as

Goal C:

Protect and enhance the quality of life of Stamford's neighborhoods, addressing land use transitions, community resources, traffic, and environmental conditions.

it serves mainly North Stamford; and it is unrealistic to think that any neighborhood can eschew some share of Town facilities. But this facility would be a better neighbor if it were more landscaped and screened. Similarly, many residents complained about nighttime activities and lighting in Dorothy Heroy Park. This park would be a better neighbor if it were closed after dark when not needed for programmed events. More important than either instance is the principle that residents should be consulted with regard to any changes or additions to Town facilities in the future.

3C4. Incrementally use traffic calming to reduce traffic impacts on North Stamford's roads. Residents participating in the workshops for the Master Plan highlighted problems on these streets: Hunting Ridge Road, Mayapple Road, Newfield Avenue, Old Long Ridge Road, Riverbank Road, Rock Rimmon Road, Scofieldtown Road, and Webbs Hill Road. In 1997, the City commissioned a traffic calming study for Scofieldtown Road.

3C5. Protect the quantity and quality of the drinking water supply. Nearly all North Stamford residents rely on wells for their drinking water. The City should therefore promote both Best Management Practices and stormwater management, especially in the watershed area, as called for by the State Department of Environmental Protection.

Goal D:

Create a vibrant, seven-days-a-week, pedestrian friendly Downtown focused both on the Transportation Center and the historic core area to its immediate north.

With its low densities, woodland topography, and high household incomes, North Stamford resembles its gilded suburban neighbors of Greenwich on the west, North Castle and Pound Ridge on the north, and New Canaan on the east. Yet in the workshops, residents expressed pride in the social diversity of the city, pride in the fact that North Stamford kids attend integrated public schools, and keen interest in strengthening Downtown as the primary place where they find employment, shopping and mass transit to New York City.

The key thing that North Stamford can do in support of Downtown is to eschew competitive retail development – something that already has the full support of the community.

More indirectly, transit connections to the Downtown can be strengthened. Most North Stamford residents commute to jobs within the city or by public transport, both focused on Downtown, only ten miles to the south. In addition, North Stamford's youth is particularly dependent on public transport, especially since there are only two public schools in North Stamford.

3D1. Create several transit stops, better connecting North Stamford to

Downtown. Along the Long Ridge Road corridor, the key locale is at the Long Ridge/Merritt Parkway retail district. Along and near the High Ridge Road corridor, the key locales are at the Stamford Museum and the new Scofieldtown Middle School. Each of these transit stops should feature clear directional signage, maybe a small parking area (akin to a small park-and-ride lot), and most importantly, an attractively designed, sheltered bus stop, that complements their design context.